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Citation for published version:

Cariola, LA 2014, 'Cities in translation', *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 118-121.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2014.938852>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/17405904.2014.938852](https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2014.938852)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Critical Discourse Studies

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BOOK REVIEW

Cariola, L. A. (2015). Book review. *Cities in translation: Intersections of language and memory* by Sherry Simon. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 12, 118-121.

Cities in translation: Intersections of language and memory, by Sherry Simon. London & New York, Routledge, 2012, 204 pp., £ 24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-47152-7. [Published as part of the New Perspectives in Translation Studies series.]

Boundaries are typically perceived to divide areas as a means of signifying geographical and cultural identity. Such divisions are often used to block out the linguistic and cultural interferences associated with the cultural “other”, whereas the opening of borders would enable to unify their cultural heritages and memories to freely converse with one another. The dichotomy of the double-edged view of borders represents the theme in the book “*Cities in Translation*”, in which Sherry Simon explores the creative language interactions of competing and co-existing languages in geographically, culturally and linguistically divided cities that connect through the practice of translation. She does this by examining the translation and literary practices of the border areas in four representative “translational” cities: Calcutta, Trieste, Barcelona and Montreal.

In Chapter 1, the author alludes to Doris Sommer’s (2003) autobiographical memory of growing up in the polylingual immigrant neighbourhood of Brooklyn as a means of introducing the notion of *puntos suspendidos* as places in which languages and cultures would be negotiated, transferred and circulated through the practice of translation. With this view, the author perceives multilingual cities foremost as “translations” because daily language negotiations and competition are integral parts of the cities’ geography, history and memories. Conversely, the tensions of language also give rise to creative encounters between the different and competing languages and cultures within cosmopolitan spaces. With the translator assuming the role of mediator, Simon poses the question of the translators’ positioning and the meaning of translational faithfulness and equivalence within the context of linguistically divided language landscapes within geographically close and familiar communities. The author draws attention to how translation practices may reinforce the cultural distance

between language communities, as well as fostering interactions among and a broader understanding of the competing languages and their culture heritage. In specific, the author proposes the emergence of alternative third spaces that represent the creative interaction of multiple languages of cosmopolitanism in the progress of literature and the arts. *By doing this, the author introduces, possibly unknowingly, a psychodynamic discourse in which the creative third space represents a problem-solving function that enables the integration of competing knowledge structures and experiential adaptation to the environment. Out of this view, the following chapters may be framed as a collection of case studies that examine the interactions between historical, sociocultural and geographical influences as well as translators' and citizens' unconscious and affective forces that drive the underlying dynamics of such an intermediate creative third space in relation to translation practices in divided cities.*

Chapter 2 explores nineteenth-century Calcutta and the influence of colonialism on the mental, social and geographical separation of the city into a northern part, which encompasses the city's cultural and social heart and houses a large portion of the population, and a southern part, which is the financial and governmental district of the affluent Europeans. These divisions, however, also fostered the cultural exchanges that characterised the Bengali Renaissance and its vast creativity in scientific developments and the emerging forms of literary and translation practices that contributed to the gradual fusion of the city's divided parts. Consistent with the dynamics of creative thought in the third-space, the author proposes that translations create a doubleness of the space by adapting cultural forms and redefining literary norms. For example, the author draws attention to the translator and linguist Herasim Stepanovich Lebedeff (1749-1817) and how he adapted and staged Western-style theatre plays in Bengali dialects and played Indian melodies on European instruments, whereas The translator Toru Dutt (1856-77) translated French poetry into Bengali by incorporating anglicised rhythms while using Bengali expressions and Sanskrit references.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Triestine-Jewish writer and translator Italo Svevo (1861-1928). Svevo lived in twentieth-century Habsburg Trieste, which was culturally and linguistically divided into an Italian zone and German-speaking Austrian zone. In particular, due Svevo's mixed cultural heritage, the author positions his literary work represents the middle ground between the residential and cultural Italian language, whereas German represented a superimposed language representative of the political

and administrative authorities. Because German was granted higher prestige than Italian was, German was also the spoken language of professionals, businesspeople and the educated population, sports societies and literary circles. The polyglot environment of Trieste, and thus embodiment of a creative third space, also enabled the creative interplay between language and cultures and provided a rich source of translations of popular German literature into the Italian spoken in daily life. Prague, another Habsburg city, represented a reversed pattern; there, German was the primary spoken language and stood in contrast to the emerging Czech nationalism. Because of Prague's distance from the German-speaking centres, the German language as spoken in Prague was overly formal, writers were insecure about their relationship with the language and their cultural identities. According to Simon, such language insecurities were expressed in Svevo's literature, which indicate the struggle to translate his creative ideas, written in the Tuscan dialect with German language interferences, into "errorless" standard Italian.

Chapter 4 explores the dual city of Barcelona and the translation practices that mediate between Spanish and Catalan. During Franco's fascistic regime, the Catalan culture and language was suppressed by the Spanish used in daily life, which divided the city of Barcelona into culture-specific neighbourhoods. The unavoidable contact between the two related Romance languages and self-translation typifies the linguistic landscape of Barcelona. In particular, the linguistic divide is associated with social class; thus, it perpetuates the memory of the class conflicts associated with the Spanish civil war and the fascistic regime. The competing languages and collective memories emerge, for example, in the literary work of Spanish writers such as Eduardo Mendoza and Carlos Ruiz Zafón, who omit Catalan from Barcelona's language landscape. According to Simon, the process of language neutralisation emerges through the process of self-translation, in which the chosen language eliminates the presence of the other language as a covert reference. Contemporary Catalan writers, such as Juan Marsé, commonly employ self-translation practices to characterise Barcelona's complex language conflict and to merge the linguistic tension with the symbolism of their literary works to represent the notion of identity loss. Conversely, the practice of self-translation and the loss of the original language give rise to the concept of betrayal and the writer's negotiated consciousness.

Chapter 5 focuses on the dual city of the officially Francophone Montreal and the tensions arising from its competition with English for dominance and urban

ownership. Simon puts forward that the co-existence of the French and English languages and cultural perspectives is highlighted during the necessary daily translation practices that are characterised by indifference and divergence, as well as accidental overlap and mergers between both languages. The author proposes that the increasingly multicultural environment influenced the emergence of third spaces that challenged Montreal's linguistic and cultural English-French dichotomy. Third spaces first emerged with an increased influx of post-war immigrants in the early 1940s. This influx marked the beginning of modernity, which took place in three geographically and culturally separate artistic milieus that pursued different artistic ideals. Thus, the "modern" Francophone population associated themselves with the spontaneous expression of the avant-garde and surrealism as a means of transgressing the limiting parameters of the bourgeoisies' traditional values. Similarly, English modernism adopted a left-wing bohemian attitude, and it aimed to integrate art within its social environment. The existence of parallel cultures also influenced translation practice, which was characterised by a distancing that reinforced the separation of the French and English communities. For example, Frank Scott (1899-1985) translated poetry literally as a means of highlighting the writer's identity and cultural origin. Distancing also influenced writers, such as Mavis Gallant, whose English short stories would explore the notion of identity and the fragility of reality.

In the final part of the book, Chapter 6, Simon introduces Bruegel's (1525-1569) Biblical painting "*The Tower of Babel*" as a visual metaphor of language multiplicity and cultural cosmopolitanism. The depicted tower shows the continuous building, reconstructing and merging of styles within its divine and creative yet fragile architecture. The depiction of King Philip at the left lower corner, however, is the reminder of human politics and unconscious forces to achieve perfection and homogeneity, and thus representing counter-creative qualities in the creative process of the third space. The author draws on the example of Istanbul, which was once a polyglot city and was transformed into a monolingual city with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the annunciation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Out of this context, the dynamicity of historical and political events as well as the human striving for communication, creativity and dominance will determine the continuously evolving future of the cities discussed in this book.

In summary, "*Cities in Translation*" is a very well-written book. It provides with great sensitivity fascinating insights that further the readers' understanding of the

translation practices as a creative process that are intertwined with on various levels with the historical, cultural and geographical settings of the four representative cities. From this view, the book is highly recommended for a wide-ranging audience, such as linguists, translators and literary critics who are interested in the intersection of multilingual cities and translation practices.

References

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